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AUTHOR Newton, Earle E.
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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of change processes in a rural school jurisdiction over a 5-year period were examined in relation to four specific goals: (1) to document changes since a planning study was done in 1982; (2) to determine if school program changes that had been adopted had reached the classroom according to teacher perceptions; (3) to report how the school system (Parkland School System, Saskatchewan) is organized to provide support for change and how that support is perceived by teachers and principals; and (4) to examine community-school interactions particularly through elected boards. A case study approach was used, with qualitative and quantitative information collected and analyzed throughout the period of the study and findings grouped under the headings of school-community setting, events and changes since 1981, and implementation and teachers' perceptions of support. The study identified positive environmental and leadership factors which led to adoption and early implementation of innovations in relation to computers, special education, and itinerant teachers. The changes are now being threatened by lack of integrated, sustained, pressure and support and by the likelihood that local political factors will prevent priority being given to a system perspective. (JHZ)

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CHANGE IN SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

Earle E. Newton
Associate Dean of Education
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0W0
(306) 966-7649

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Change in Small Rural Schools

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to investigate change process, particularly community variables and teacher support, in a selected rural school system over a five-year period. It was found that multiple changes were underway and that teachers perceived program improvements in areas where the board had adopted change. In addition, students generally felt more positive about the quality of school life than they had five years earlier with grades 7, 8 and 9 students being more positive than those in grades 10, 11 and 12. The changes came about by a combination of external, financial support, leadership from the superintendent, and support from the board. Teachers perceived more support from their own resources and from central office than they did from school-level factors - the local community. Continuation of the changes was being threatened by lack of integrated, school-level support and by local historical and political factors.

March, 1987

CHANGE IN SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

Introduction

Public scrutiny of schooling continues to intensify from many perspectives. Government leaders think of schools in relation to social problems such as unemployment and to perceived public priorities such as prayer in classrooms. Elected school board officials tend to concentrate on standardized test results, economic restraint and declining enrolments. Students and parents are increasingly aware of human rights and their choices regarding which schools to support. From within the profession the Saskatchewan School Improvement Project (1986) is typical with its emphasis on strong leadership, planned curriculum, shared vision, quality instruction, caring climate, monitoring and evaluation, school-community relations and staff development. Whetten (1981) described the situation as a movement away from schools as closed, rational organizations where the administrators were problem-solvers to schools as open, political organizations where administrators are dilemma managers.

Change processes in education are being profoundly influenced by the increasing openness of schools to external forces be they legislative, demographic, economic, social, cultural or political (Baldridge & Burnham, 1975; Dalin, 1978; Hopkirk & Newton, 1986; Patterson, Purkey & Parker, 1986; Sarason, 1982; Terreberry, 1976). Since the traditional interdependence between rural communities and the school has been emphasized by several writers (Darnell & Simpson, 1981; Brown & Maisey, 1980; Gjelten, 1978; Nachtigal, 1980) the likelihood of even increased external influences on rural schools raises questions about how change processes in these schools are being affected. The aspect of change that appears to receive the most attention in the literature on rural schools is that teachers typically lack opportunities for professional development (e.i. Baker & Ambrose, 1985; Fullan, 1982; Massey & Crosby, 1983; Putnam, 1986). Sher (1983b) commented more generally by saying:

> One of the recurring themes in the research on school improvement is that the official, intended beneficiaries only occasionally enjoy the rewards of the reforms carried out on their behalf. (p. 282)

The study reported in this paper was designed to analyze change processes over a five-year period in a selected, rural school jurisdiction with emphasis upon the role of elected representatives of communities and support systems for the teachers. Background literature and the theoretical framework will be considered before the research is presented.

Background Literature

Since definitions of "rural" and "small" are problematic, the writer wishes to point out that the ten schools in this study ranged in size from 355 students, K-12 and 20 teachers to a one room school of 14 students. They were located in mixed farming communities of up to 1200 people. With these operational definitions in mind a sample of literature will be reviewed under the headings of the rural school-community and small rural schools.

The Rural School-Community

Social pressure to improve schools implies change yet some features of rural communities are considered to be impediments to change. For example, Sher (1977) stated that political conservatism and cultural homogeneity of rural areas support stable conditions. Change is made difficult by isolation, traditional and localized values and a shortage of resources according to Boyd & Immegart (1977). They elaborated by comparing urban areas where they claim schools are viewed as vehicles for individual and community progress to rural communities where they say schools are seen as mechanisms for community cohesion and continuity. This view is supported by Dunne (1983) who reported that small rural communities see the local school as crucial to their continuing existence and the center of daily life so they keep a close watch on curriculum choices frequently believing that they must intervene in the light of local values. She went on to say that rural people often feel controlled by government or urban priorities so offset that by exercising a high degree of control over local institutions. Another perspective is provided by Massey & Crosby (1983):

> ...rural communities are politically invisible and impotent. Rural residents are far more likely to suffer in silence than to demand attention from agencies and institutions ostensibly designed to serve them. (p. 266)

While many rural communities could be described as stable in terms of mobility of people, the value system and the economic base, Terreberry (1976) would describe the environment as turbulent in the sense that the accelerating rate and complexity of interactive effects of systems limits the capacity of any one system to predict and, hence control, consequences of their actions. School boards, in other words, may feel relatively powerless in the light of the interactive effects of political, economic and social systems. The environment may be viewed as turbulent at general societal levels yet placid and clustered, to use Terreberry's terms, at the community level. In the opinion of Baldridge & Burnham (1975), the clustered, placid environment is a problem in that such situations do not provide an impetus for change. In their words:

> a large, complex organization with a heterogeneous environment is more likely to adopt innovations than a small, simple organization within a relatively stable, homogeneous environment. (p. 175)

One wonders, therefore, where the impetus for change is to arise in the small schools of stable communities.

Further insight into the rural-school-community environment has been provided by Gibb (1978) who considered environmental quality on a ten-point scale. The first two levels on the scale were labelled punitive and autocratic with the latter described as a situation in which power and authority were used to maintain control and order (p. 121). This appears similar to what Boyd & Immegart (1977) viewed as a private - regarding political structure characterized by a narrow sense of "we" (p. 57). Serious concern about the self-centered political environment of many rural school-communities has been expressed by Sher (1983b):

> Unfortunately, when the needs of children conflict with the interests of more powerful constituencies, our leaders have too often decided that bringing home the bacon is more important than nurturing the piglets (p. 280).

Although some characteristics of rural communities make change in schools difficult it is not impossible. Rural community influence can be positive in some respects and some schools are reported to be improving.

Small Rural Schools

Many authorities in their comments about small schools support Sher's (1983a) contention that strengths and weaknesses are both evident. Hull (1986) stated that calls for reform in education are compounded in many small schools by limited resources, restricted curriculum, and isolation yet the tradition of sharing is well-grounded. Mathes & Carlson (1986) identified difficulties in relation to small schools being insulated and to fewer opportunities for personal and professional growth yet many teachers choose small schools for advantages in pace of living, cost of living and smallness. Barker (1985) claimed that many problems such as finances, shortage of teachers, changing social values, and special interest groups were magnified in small high schools yet, due to smaller size, they offered the best opportunities to create a school climate conducive to the best teaching and learning. Foster & Martinez (1985) summarized their views by saying that small schools appear to experience difficulty in staffing and in offering a wide variety of curriculum options compared to larger schools yet students seem more actively involved in activities that develop leadership qualities and close working relationships. While the descriptors above may describe typical small schools many writers emphasize the diversity among small schools. McBurney & O'Reilly (1985) in an article on the delivery of resource teacher service concluded that no one model fits all rural areas.

Aspects of small schools have been investigated by various researchers. Mathes & Carlson (1986) and McBurney & O'Reilly have emphasized that teacher recruitment and retention deserve special attention in rural areas. Massey & Crosby (1983) advocate teacher preparation programs that equip teachers in rural areas to be generalists in terms of subjects and age groups, to understand the role of the community, to build a sense of professionalism, to gain access to information and to reinforce self-confidence. Horn, Davis & Helt (1985) similarily recommend that preparation for teaching include a second teaching area, guidelines for selecting curriculum materials, techniques for self-assessment of teaching, preparation of materials, and

formulating a professional development plan. In focussing upon students, Sher (1983a) reported that students from small schools do as well or even slightly better academically than those from large schools. Wilson (1985), after investigating achievement in elementary mathematics on a state-wide basis, came to the same conclusion. Foster & Martinez (1985) found that student attitude and self concept were not correlated with size of school. Multigrade classrooms have social and psychological benefits for students according to Pratt (1986).

Some literature is devoted to various forms of support for teachers in small schools. Reed & Busby (1985) state that teachers need incentives to teach in small schools and that social, monetary and psychological needs must all be considered. Trentham & Schaer (1985) found that rural teachers drew satisfaction primarily from students and peers whereas urban teachers drew satisfaction from having good facilities and opportunities for social and cultural development. In another rural-urban comparison Mathes & Carlson (1986) summarized that teachers in rural settings highlighted support from parents and community whereas those in urban settings viewed support from the administration as important. They also gave examples of forms of support which included reimbursement for tuition for a graduate course, release time for working on curriculum or visiting classrooms, inservice workshops designed by classroom teachers with administrative support, university courses delivered to the districts that were focussed on local projects, hiring teachers during the summer to attend institutes and work on projects, and conferences sponsored by the board and administration. Baker & Ambrose (1985) from a study in England concluded that the most effective inservice is at the classroom level with both the teacher and inservice tutor engaged in teaching, analyses and evaluation. Other writers (Baker & Ambrose, 1985; Fullan, 1982; Lundsgaard, 1983; Massey & Crosby, 1983; Putnam, 1986; Trentham & Scher, 1985) have expressed the view that teachers in small schools typically have limited opportunities for professional development or to be exposed to new ideas. Looking more generally at the difficulty of making changes in rural schools Kleinfeld, McDiarmid & Parrett (1986) suggest that it is important to proceed slowly, to let people get to know you first, to establish trust, to be slow to judge or to make conclusions, to realize that people often do not respond as you might hope or expect and to prepare for disappointments. From an organizational perspective these same writers state that in small schools the

wheels of bureaucracy are smaller, turn faster and make such schools more flexible. Alvey & Coladarci (1985) however, surface a concern when in their study of novice, rural principals instructional leadership was identified as an area of major difficulty.

Despite the recognition of both strengths and weaknesses and major difficulties in providing opportunities for professional development of teachers, many writers are optimistic about rural schools. Dunne (1983) has found that rural people are proud of their schools and typically refer to a family feeling, attention to individuals, and the commitment of community resources and people. She observed that despite distress with schools at the national level surveys in rural areas indicate a 75 percent level of satisfaction with schools. This finding has been supported by several planning studies in rural jurisdictions in the province of Saskatchewan (e.g. Newton, Pyra, Wilson & Wright, 1983; Guy, Dibski, Lucas, & Newton, 1982). Putnam (1986) says "The small rural schools are alive and well" (p. 18). He goes on to claim that with a new spirit of co-operation and new technology their future is bright. Kleinfeld, McDiarmimd & Parrett believe that, "Small rural high schools not only can work they are working" (p. I-5). The study of change in education is to gain insight into why some work and why some do not.

Change in Education - A Theoretical Framework

A useful review of research on educational change has been provided by Berman (1981). According to his analysis, work starting in the 1960's focussed upon dissemination of innovations into systems that were considered rational. That emphasis was followed by attention to the adoption of change and characteristics of adopters. Berman identified the most recent development as concentrating on implementation of change within a particular organizational and environmental context. Another historical perspective has been provided by Fullan (1986) who notes that the study of change since 1970 has moved from documenting failure, to analysis of success and presently is focussed upon the management of change.

Early work in building a theory of educational change was done within an organization known as "The International Movement Towards Educational Change" (IMTEC). Through over 200 case studies of change in various countries theory began to emerge and findings were published by Per Dalin (1978) in a book,

Limits to Educational Change. Dalin wrote that in order to understand the dynamics of change processes in education many interacting factors had to be considered. He categorized these factors under four headings: the educational setting, the environment (parents, the economy, etc.), the innovation itself and the change strategy (degree of participation, workshops, etc.)(p. 77). In this decade writers such as Fullan (1982) emphasize that change is a process which takes place over a considerable period of time (more than one school year) and includes phases of adoption or initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome (p. 40). Studies have revealed that different combinations of factors affect each phase of the change process and that adopting a change is quite a different matter from putting it into action or implementing it. For example, Common (1981) wrote an article entitled, "Two Decades of Curriculum Innovation and So Little Change" and Charters & Jones (1973) asserted that many intended changes are "non-events." The difficulties in effectively implementing change in education have shifted the efforts of researchers from a theory of change to a theory of changing with emphasis on gaining understanding of the dynamics of the process over time.

Two studies will illustrate the focus of current research. The large-scale DESSI project (a study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement) has been reported by people such as Huberman & Miles (1984) and Cox (1983). Huberman & Miles (1984) conducted a detailed cross-case analysis of 12 school district case studies in which they examined the development and implementation of specific innovations. They found that most innovations were initiated by district personnel, not by local school personnel, and that successful implementation depended upon strong administrative support and commitment at the district level as well as on-going assistance from local and external facilitators. In summary, district administrators, consultants and school level personnel each had complementary roles in the change process. Cox (1983) reported on the development and implementation of 61 innovations in 146 schools in 10 states. In the study, 96 facilitators external to the school districts and 78 district facilitators were interviewed. Factor analysis indicated that the activities of change facilitators clustered around 9 areas: (1) initiation or awareness of the change, (2) preparing administrators for adoption, (3) support for teachers, (4) preparing teachers for adoption, (5) materials, (6) implementation assistance, (7) evaluation, (8) diffusion and continuation, and (9) allocating financial resources. Cox

concluded that external and local facilitators were involved in many of the same activities, but externally developed innovations were implemented to a greater extent with both local and external assistance.

Fullan, Anderson & Newton (1986) did intensive case studies of four school systems in Ontario in order to examine how boards stimulate, support, co-ordinate and assess the effectiveness of curriculum changes. Data collection included print materials, questionnaires to curriculum consultants and interviews with 32 supervisory officers, 37 consultants, 16 principals and 32 teachers. Findings were organized around 10 overlapping and mutually reinforcing themes: (1) attention is shifting from innovations to systems,

(2) the role of secondary schools in change is relatively unknown,

(3) integration of curriculum and professional development,

(4) integration of authority and support,

(5) school-level and district-level co-development,

(6) teacher involvement and incentives,

(7) new roles for consultants,

(8) promotion criteria,

(9) longitudinal development of the elements of planned change, and

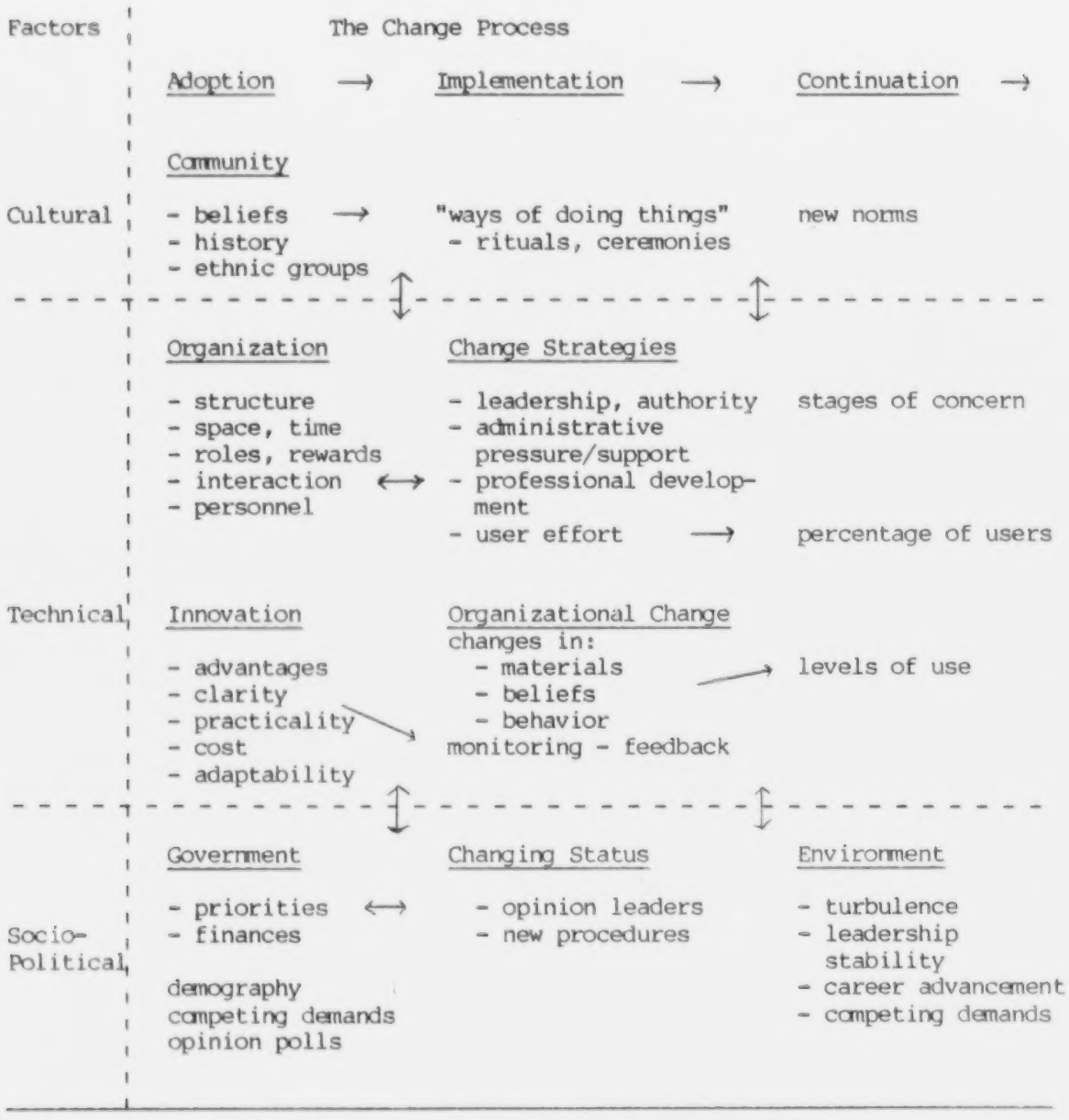
(10) building the capacity of a school system to manage change. (p. 319)

While the studies reported above focus particularly upon the dynamics of technical factors within school organizations, some research has been directed at investigation of cultural and socio-political considerations. Dalin (1978) urged us to view the school and the educational process as part of a complex social system. Earlier in this paper Crowfoot & Chesler's (1976) attention to the political perspective and Terreberry's analysis of environments were noted in relation to rural communities. Cultural factors are being investigated by writers such as Sarason (1982) and Kilman (1985). Hopkirk & Newton (1986) have called for perspectives in addition to the linear, bureaucratic. Fullan (1982) cautions against hyperrationality, and Patterson, Purkey and Parker (1986) call their book Productive School Systems for a Nonrational World. The point is that a conceptual model for analysis of change in education should not be confined to the technical, rational components.

A synthesis of much of the research reported above has been presented by Corbett & Rossman (1986). They have started to develop a path analysis of factors affecting curriculum change in schools by considering three streams of interacting factors (cultural, technical and political) to influence change as antecedent, intervening or outcome variables. The writer has combined Corbett and Rossman's (1986) categorization of factors, Miles' (1983) data-grounded model of institutionalization, and Fullan's (1982) phases of change to provide a conceptual framework for this study. (See Figure 1). The items on the grid are factors generally considered to affect change processes. For example, community beliefs, the organizational structure of a school system and government priorities usually affect the adoption of a particular innovation. The lines separating the three categories of factors are broken to illustrate interaction among cultural, technical and socio-political variables. Within each category interactions are too numerous for all to be included. To illustrate, research by Miles (1983) and by Corbett & Rossman (1986) has found user effort to be related to administrative support and both are related to continuation.

Figure 1

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE CHANGE PROCESS



Key: ↕ are reminders of interaction among categories of factors

⟷ illustrate research findings about one-way and two-way interactions.

Purposes and Methodology

The general purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of change processes in a selected rural school jurisdiction over a five-year period with emphasis upon community-board influence and support for teachers. More specific objectives were:

1) to document changes since a planning study was done in 1982,
2) to determine if school program changes that had been adopted had reached the classroom according to teacher perceptions,
3) to report how the school system is organized to provide support for change and how that support is perceived by teachers and principals, and
4) to examine community-school interactions particularly through elected boards.

The case study method was chosen in order to accomplish the purposes of the investigation because according to Yin (1981) the case study is appropriate when contemporary phenomena are to be examined in their natural context and, particularly, when boundaries between phenomena and context are not clear. In the research reported here the boundary between school and community is not clear and the importance of context to understanding change processes in schools is well established in the literature. The researcher in doing the study was guided by the values set forth by Fetterman (1982): the insiders' view, a holistic approach in keeping with the conceptual framework, and a nonjudgmental attitude. Data collection included both qualitative and quantitative information collected over a period of 5 years. As Owens (1982) described, data collection and data analysis went on simultaneously with the latter receiving increased attention by means of peer consultation and member checks as the study proceeded. Questionnaire results were tabulated and averaged but statistical analysis was considered inappropriate. Details of procedures are described below:

1. The 1982 study conducted by the writer and two colleagues included questionnaires to all teachers, parents and students in grades 7 to 12 inclusive, interviews with administrators and board members and study of documents such as board minutes, annual reports and

budgets. Interim findings were checked with and presented to the division board and to each school principal.

2. The 1986 study, conducted by the writer and four graduate students, included basically the same questionnaires to all teachers and principals and to students in grades 7 to 12 inclusive. In addition, interviews focussed upon support for change were held with each teacher. System documents were studied and the researcher attended the annual meeting and various professional development activities. Preliminary findings were discussed with division board members and checked by at least three people from each school. Extensive consultation was done with the superintendent.
3. During the time between studies, the writer visited the jurisdiction on several occasions, read local newspapers and communicated regularly with the superintendent and others.

In summary, the study was designed to provide for trustworthiness as viewed by Guba (1981). Credibility and dependability have been provided for in terms of a prolonged period of data collection, multiple sources of data, peer debriefing, member checks and having teams of researchers. Space does not permit a detailed description of the context nor a complete report of decisions made during the study but they are recorded if readers are concerned about transferability of findings and/or confirmability of results. It should be noted that the researcher was raised in rural Saskatchewan and may have a bias in favour of small rural schools.

Findings

The results of this research are presented under four headings: the school-community setting, events and changes since 1981, implementation and teachers' perceptions of support.

The School-Community Setting

The Parkland School System covers approximately 1,500 square miles in a remote area of east, central Saskatchewan. Most people are descendants of Ukrainian settlers who came at the turn of the century to begin mixed farming.

They are known to be hard working, church-going and close to the soil. Although the provision of elementary and secondary schooling was always considered important, the region does not have a high participation rate in post-secondary education. The land is assessed at a value below the provincial average and provincial grants contribute approximately 70 percent of the annual revenue of 5.5 million dollars for K-12 schooling.

The two largest towns (A and B) in the System, of 1200 and 800 people, respectively, are only five miles apart and the third largest community (C) is about twenty miles east. The other tiny villages are scattered. It should be noted that early in the history of the area the second largest town had a boarding school and became known as the education centre. The school system offices are located there. The largest town surpassed its neighbouring community in population and was made the location of the hospital - a health centre. There is intense rivalry between these two communities and the one is gaining steadily over the other.

The six Division Board members are elected from school attendance areas with one from each of the three towns referred to above, one from a provincial pilot K-8 school, one representing a two-room school, and one representing three small schools of from 1 to 3 teachers each. Although there are not many people moving into these communities, there is a tradition of electing "locals" to the Board. Board members are in the habit of each looking out for their own area rather than supporting a system view. The Chair of the Board is a woman from town A and the person reported to be at least second in influence is a man from town C. The other four members are younger and newer to the Board. The spouses of the 3 male Board members are employed in the system. In addition to the Board, each school has an increasingly active local board of from 5 to 7 members. In all there are approximately 50 elected board members in a system of 1300 students and 85 teachers. The central office staff is a superintendent, a secretary-treasurer and two secretaries.

In the 1982 planning study parents were asked what, in comparison to schools of the present, should be emphasized in schools of the future. Their five most frequent responses in order of support included learning to be a good manager of money, property and resources, time for teachers to provide individual attention, helping students to develop good character and self respect, programs for students with special needs, and discipline. Areas such

as drug, alcohol and sex education, basic skills, computers, guidance and career counselling they thought should receive moderate attention. Lowest priority was given to religious education, contributions of various ethnic groups to our way of life, band, music, art and second languages. A telephone survey of 264 parents and 264 other community members centered in town B in 1986 revealed the following:

a) approximately 50 percent of the people are undecided whether the mill rate is too high or too low, about 25 percent feel it is too high and the same number believe it is acceptable,
b) twice as many parents as non-parents were satisfied with the mill rate, and
c) more than 75 percent believe it is important to teach a second language and over 60 percent think it should be French.

Priority for a second language, namely French, certainly changed in the four-year period.

In the 1986 teacher interviews there were virtually no negative comments regarding the support that was received from the community. It was pointed out, however, that parents in some communities had been skeptical about new programs and that additional meetings were required before they became supportive.

Events and Changes Since 1981

In 1982, the government of Saskatchewan financed planning studies of rural school jurisdictions that were experiencing enrolment decline of approximately 30 percent. The Board of the Parkland System chose to be involved and the writer was one of three university faculty who did the study. The general approach was one of constructing scenarios of alternative futures so that the 101-page report could be used by the Board for discussion and for long-range planning. Data were collected by means of questionnaires to students, teachers and parents and interviews with administrators, local trustees and Board members. While the report dealt with enrolments, finance, school closure and transportation emphasis was placed upon school program, involvement of communities, professional development of teachers, leadership and potential advantages of "smallness." Since the report was presented to the Board in the fall of 1982 the following events have taken place:

1. Issues and options presented in the report were discussed at the local level in each of the eight communities.
2. New school facilities have been added in each of the four largest communities and schools of from 1 to 3 teachers have remained open in the other four.
3. Four of the six Board members in 1982 have retired. The 1986-87 Board is made up of six relatively young people - 3 men and 3 women. The Chair is a woman.
4. The same Superintendent is in office. There has been very little change in professional staff.
5. There is some concern about the local mill rate and this was voiced at the annual meeting. The prices of most farm products are low.
6. In 1985 the provincial government established an Educational Development Fund to encourage local initiative. In 1985-86 the Parkland Division received almost $90,000.00 for learning resources, efficiency measures and program improvement. A five year plan has been formulated which requests almost $300,000.00 for 1986-87.
7. Program changes have been made in the following areas:
   a) special education - work-study, class for educable mentally retarded, gifted
   b) languages - native, French and Ukrainian
   c) computers - in all schools, MECC membership
   d) provincial curriculum changes - social studies, mathematics, health, music, language arts
   e) itinerant teachers - second languages, science, special education
   f) professional development - a leadership development program for principals and vice-principals, a series of ten video-tape sessions for teachers in relation to mainstreaming, 60 teachers supported to attend workshops in 1985-86.
8. In 1986 a K-8 school with an innovative timetable was selected to be one of 14 pilot schools in a provincial school improvement project.

It should be noted that of 200 Board motions in the fall of 1985 over 30 percent were related to program and this is more than in any other category. Officials at the regional level consider the Parkland System to be more active than most jurisdictions.

Implementation

A major purpose of this investigation was to determine if changes adopted at the Board level reached the classroom and if there had been changes in grades 7 to 12 student perceptions of school life since 1982.

Student Perceptions of Quality of School Life. Data were gathered by means of a 12-item, Likert-type questionnaire. Items included "I enjoy school," "My school has a good spirit," "My teachers understand me," and "Students' suggestions are taken into consideration in deciding school policy." In each of the three schools offering grades 7 to 12, students' views were more positive than they were in 1982 with the average gain in numbers of students agreeing being about 8 percent. Climate-related items were generally positive but very little gain has been made since 1982 in student suggestions being considered in policy making. A surprising finding is that students in grades 7, 8 and 9 have noticeably more positive views than students in grades 10, 11 and 12.

Teacher Perceptions of Program. In both the 1982 and the 1986 study all teachers were asked to respond to aspects of program on a 5-point, Likert-type scale from which a profile was constructed. Since 1982, gains of more than one scale interval have been made in relation to programs for the gifted, the handicapped, and slow learners. Computer-related programs changed from a mean of 1.1 to 4.1. Of the 20 program components teachers reported some progress over the four years in 16, two were considered unchanged and guidance and career awareness were viewed less favourably.

This study included student perceptions because students are often neglected in studies of changes in schools and because the writer was curious about a comparison of findings over a four-year period although there were no deliberate innovations to improve quality of school life. Teacher perceptions of program indicate that the Board's adoption decisions were being implemented to a degree at least at the classroom level.

Teachers' Perceptions of Support

Findings reported so far indicate that multiple changes have been adopted in the Parkland System and that some at least are viewed by teachers as having a positive impact at the classroom level. In order to gain insight into sources of support for change the teacher questionnaire included sections about opportunities for professional development, resources, and support for new programs. In addition, each teacher was interviewed and asked what sources of support existed at the regional, system and school level. In February, 1987, findings from questionnaires and interviews were reported, checked and discussed with at least two people from each school. Results are outlined below in relation to support services, professional development and support for program change.

Support Services. Of the 19 items the five viewed most frequently as providing support were professional preparation, teacher choice of methods and materials, extra hours in preparation, a variety of approaches to teaching and utilization of teacher talent. The items seen as providing support least frequently were the student assessment program, community resources (field trips etc.), librarians and resource teachers, shared planning by teachers and influence on division policy. The only item with a gain of at least one interval on a 5-point scale was having sufficient staff.

Professional Development. Opportunities for inservice education averaged a 4.0 or "often" on the scale. Elements in a "sometimes" category in order are leave policy, time, teacher input into planning, focus on teaching strategies, use of outside personnel, effective division meetings, attention to development and implementation, use of local personnel, school-level inservice and inservice about evaluation. Although school-level inservice is still ranked low it showed average improvement from 1.7 to 3.0 since 1982.

Support for Program Change. All 11 items on this scale were rated in a "sometimes" range from 3.9 to 3.1. In order of frequency they are as follows: the Superintendent, teachers informal talk, teacher discussions about instruction, materials, workshops, parents and community, talks with the

principal, support and appreciation from the Board, the principal, and itinerant staff. Since raw scores may be even more important than averages, they are illustrated below for 4 items along with the extent to which teachers feel left to their own resources.

Table 1

Support for Program Change

Raw Scores

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Teacher talk-informal		1	28	23	10
The principal helps		9	24	24	4
Itinerant teachers		8	32	16	3
"Pretty much on my own"	3	16	18	18	5

In summarizing this section it should be noted that 31 of the 58 teachers who returned questionnaires felt "somewhat" more effective as teachers than they did 5 years ago and 25 think they are "much improved." Similarily, 20 see themselves as average, 31 as somewhat above average and 7 as well above average. Support and professional development activities appear to be meeting teacher expectations.

Themes and Discussion

In this final section of the paper findings are reviewed and interactions among factors are expressed as themes for discussion in relation to the literature, particularly the conceptual framework. Results of this study are summarized as follows:

1. Multiple program changes adopted by a rural school division board have been implemented to a degree at least at the classroom level according to the perception of teachers.
2. Although related changes were not deliberately planned at the system or school level, student views of quality of school life are generally more positive than they were four years ago.
3. Teachers frequently draw support from their professional preparation, the element of choice in their daily work, and extra individual effort but only sometimes feel supported by their

influence on system policy, shared planning with colleagues, librarian or resource teachers and community resources.

4. Aspects of professional development most common to the system are opportunities for inservice, leave policy, time and teacher input into planning. Less frequent is inservice about evaluation, school-level activity and the use of local personnel.
5. Support for program change is most often from the Superintendent with teacher interaction and materials almost as common. The lowest items on the scale were assistance from the principal, itinerant teachers and consultants.
6. Teacher perceptions of support varied widely within and among the schools. There appear to be many configurations of support.
7. The community and board are seen by teachers to offer a middle range of support. During interviews there were relatively few comments about the community. Two exceptions were related to some parents being skeptical about a new plan whereby each teacher in a small school taught one subject for grades 2 to 8, and an example of school-community co-operation in providing a rink and tennis courts.

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates that change processes in education are influenced by a complex interaction of many factors over time. The writer has identified prominent clusters of factors and presented them as themes for discussion and further study. The themes are:

1. Incentives for Change in Small Rural Schools
2. Pressure and Support
3. Strong, Continuous Leadership
4. Seeing the Bigger Picture

Each theme will be elaborated upon briefly to conclude this paper.

1. Incentives for Change in Small Rural Schools

The Parkland School System was opportunistic in the sense that it utilized special, provincial funding for the 1982 study and for many program initiatives since that time. The impetus for change did not come from within

the system in terms of unsolved problems or unmet challenges. The only problem that surfaced was the question of school closure but the rational approach of the 1982 study did not bring any change in that regard as political factors dominated.

Availability of external funding, the leadership of the Superintendent and a certain amount of openness on the part of the board have resulted in some changes being adopted and implemented to a point. Prior to 1982 the Parkland community was politically invisible and impotent to use the terms of Massey & Crosby (1983).

2. Pressure and Support

The multiple changes that are underway in the Parkland school system and the day-to-day challenge of classroom teaching no doubt create pressure for teachers which in theory should be balanced with support. It has been found in this research that teachers more frequently draw support from their own preparation and effort and from system activities than they do from school-level factors. It should be remembered too that teachers believe they are becoming increasingly effective and more than half think they are above average. This finding of low school support is surprising in view of the literature about advantages of smallness such as a feeling of family and small schools being known for co-operation. The teacher interviews did not reveal parental and community support as reported by Mathes & Carlson (1986), nor the dissatisfaction with system management found by Kleinfeld & McDiarmid (1986). Neither do these results support the concern about the preparation of rural teachers and the lack of professional development activities. This theme, however, is consistent with the results of Fullan, Anderson and Newton (1986) pertaining to the need for co-development at the school and system level.

3. Strong, Continuous Leadership

The Superintendent was clearly a leader in the adoption phase of the change processes but results indicate that the leadership has not been assumed at the school level. The Superintendent does not get into schools very often and principals are just in the early stages of a leadership development program. These findings are disconcerting in the light of Huberman's (1983)

conclusion that successful school improvement usually occurred in places where administrators exerted strong and continuous pressure on teachers. One obvious need in Parkland is to clarify the goals and meaning of innovations, to develop implementation plans, to provide for monitoring and evaluation and to determine roles and responsibilities. The technical factors at the implementation phase do not appear to be positive and they centre around the need for strong, continuous leadership.

4. Seeing the Bigger Picture

In the literature review the tendency of rural school communities to be clustered and placid, Terreberry (1976), private-regarding to use Boyd & Immegart's (1977) term, or in a self-centered political environment according to Sher (1983b) was noted. There are some indications that the Parkland system may be moving beyond a narrow view. They have capitalized on external funding by having a planning study done and to initiate program changes in special education and computer-related projects. They are moving away from the local language and asking that French be taught in schools. They have supported a leadership development program for administrators. Although the board does not have any members with professional training they are a much younger group than they were five years ago and there have been more women elected. The fact that local community boards are increasingly active, however, may mitigate against a larger system view. There are also strong, traditional rivalries between communities and a powerful norm that teachers do not visit, let alone get transferred to, another school in the system. There are also examples of the irrational such as students being bussed through the largest town in the system to attend school at the "Comp" as they have always done.

This study of change in small rural schools has identified positive environmental and leadership factors which led to adoption and early implementation of innovations in relation to computers, special education and itinerant teachers. The changes are now being threatened by lack of integrated, sustained pressure and support and by the likelihood that local political factors will prevent priority being given to a system perspective. This research supports the view of Kleinfeld, McDiarmid & Hagstrom (1985), who wrote, "The malleability of these small schools is at one their greatest opportunity and their greatest weakness." (p. 148)

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